

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

DD/S&T#3341-73

27 October 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President for National
Security Affairs

SUBJECT : Critique of Middle East Crisis

1. My first, and most important, comment is that the WSAG meetings seemed to provide an effective means for both you and the President to direct the USG response to the Middle East crisis on a timely and informed basis. This crisis has demonstrated to me the importance of having one central high-level clearing house for both policy issues and relevant intelligence. Because all members of the WSAG were well informed of each other's activities concerning the crisis, each of our agencies and departments was able to respond in a mutually supportive and reinforcing manner. This was especially important to me in attempting to focus both intelligence collection and analysis on those issues of most critical importance to the decision-makers.

2. Our Intelligence Community Staff has begun a thorough review of all intelligence community activities pertaining to the Middle East crisis. We hope to learn some valuable lessons from this exercise, and I will be happy to share them with you when the study is completed. You may, however, be interested in some of the following preliminary conclusions:

a. There was an initial analytical failure in the sense that the intelligence community did not issue a clear warning of impending Arab-Israeli hostilities. As you have noted, this was not so much a question of turning up the "facts," but one of interpretation and analysis. Over a period of time many of our Middle East analysts apparently developed a conceptual framework that simply did not allow them to accept what in retrospect turned out to be fairly good evidence of impending hostilities. Our judgments on Arab

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military effectiveness were also deficient and led us to initially miscalculate the course the fighting would take. Somehow we must build into our analytical process an automatic challenge or advocacy of variations to the consensus.

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b. Our analysis of the war was hampered by a lack of sufficient hard intelligence on both Arab and Israeli intentions and military capabilities.

c. Our military analytical problem during the war would have been eased with timely photography of the battlefields. There were, of course, good political reasons for limiting the number of SR-71 flights, and for technical reasons we were not able to get much from satellite coverage. This experience reinforces the argument for a near real-time satellite program which could make a significant contribution in future crisis situations.

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d. Our analytical input to the WSAG was mainly a CIA product, although the raw intelligence used was all-source. In the future, I hope to bring the full analytical weight of the entire intelligence community more directly to bear on WSAG and SRG considerations. This is essentially a bureaucratic organizational problem which I hope to get at through the new National Intelligence Officers system and our revitalized Intelligence Community Staff.

e. One problem is inevitable, the desire of the analysts to know more about U. S. actions, plans and negotiations in a situation like

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this so that they may better judge foreign actions and reactions. I fully understand the need for secrecy in our Government on these delicate subjects, although it is clear that the back channel in many instances is becoming the main channel, causing lost and even counterproductive motion, aside from anguish, among many not in the circuit. However, I was able to develop some requirements, which I at least pretended to be my own, which might contribute to the policy process as I perceived it from WSAG meetings. While this does not satisfy our analysts, it is an attempt at a reasonable compromise between their understandable appetites and the need for secrecy. Even in cases in which we did not know the full picture, I believe at least in theory that our independent assessment may occasionally have presented new perspectives or differences in the way a situation appeared from your vantage point. In the possible event that you might be taking a wrong turn, such contributions might help you to correct your course, even without the analysts knowing it. I would be interested to know whether this theory is accurate on the basis of your experience.

3. The best judge of our intelligence performance during this crisis really is with you as its principal customer. I have in train a post-mortem which will include interviews with your staff and others who might cast a light on this question and give us a basis for improvement. I would be particularly appreciative of any comments you might make beyond the quite appropriate ones you have made on our error in not predicting the outbreak of hostilities.

4. I cannot close without a word of praise for your own performance during this affair. Your broad strategic concept and your handling of tactical contacts were all brought together to achieve, I believe, a remarkable result. They were capped by a brilliant performance before the public, the ultimate judge, at your press conference.

/s/ Bill

W. E. Colby
Director

SH/WEC:blp

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